

# Learning Online and On the Job in Mexico



Mexico's public servants learn online as part of their government's plan to create a professional, nonpartisan public service.

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*Louise Guénette*

Laura Dávila is back in school. Sitting at her desk in the virtual [@Campus Mexico](#) classroom, the Mexican public servant is learning about her own government — its ministries and legal framework, its access to information and public service accountability laws, and its efforts to make good governance a core value within its ranks. Although she is Assistant Director of Socioeconomic Analysis in Mexico's antipoverty program, this is her first real look at her own employer.

Dávila's return to the classroom is part of an ambitious program by the Mexican government to reform its public administration. In April 2003, the Mexican Congress approved the Career Public Service Law to promote and support a professional, nonpartisan public service. The law stipulates that promotions and hirings are to be based on merit rather than on political influence or connections. The law also requires the government to evaluate and offer training to public servants, who must undergo a certification process at least once every five years to retain their jobs. Seventy years of one-party rule, which ended when Vicente Fox was elected president in December 2000, had left an indelible mark on the attitudes and behaviour of many public servants. Hirings, firings, and promotions were frequently based on personal or political whims. The notion of serving the Mexican public often took a back seat to personal loyalties. Dismantling these networks of favouritism will be a key to reforming the public service, says Jesús Mesta, Deputy Minister of Public Administration.

Under the Mexican constitution, presidents can only serve one six-year term. "With every change of president, institutions fill up with new staff to modify programs," says Mesta. "People feel they owe the friend who got them in or the person who hired them. When selection criteria are based on people's merits, the public servant will see the citizen as boss and illicit behaviour will diminish."

## Education portal



That's where @Campus Mexico comes in. The portal is part of the government's commitment to recruit, retain, and promote employees based on merit and equity. It is designed to provide public servants with the tools and systems they need to continually improve the way they serve Mexican citizens.

The portal, officially launched in Mexico by President Fox on October 20, targets some 47,700 managers, ranging from analysts to general directors in 85 federal agencies. Learning materials on the portal are geared to develop and strengthen competencies in three core areas: good government, management, and technical skills usually associated with specific job requirements. More than 60 courses have been designed and are ready for delivery by a variety of institutions, including academic, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations. Online and traditional channels will be combined to provide a variety of learning approaches.

The @Campus Mexico portal is tied to a certification process to ensure ongoing improvements to the public service. Initial testing and evaluation of public servants will begin in 2005 and will be repeated at least every five years. Employees will be assessed on core competencies, knowledge, and performance, says Enrique Cárdenas, Director General of Development and Training in the Ministry of Public Administration. Civil servants will be given two opportunities for a satisfactory assessment, otherwise they will be dismissed. Public servants who have successfully completed the certification process, on the other hand, will be given a measure of job security. They cannot be fired without just cause — a situation that was all too common prior to the Career Public Service Law.

## Canadian experience

In developing the @Campus Mexico portal, Mesta drew upon the experiences of Great Britain, Spain, and the United States, but looked to Canada for most of the advice needed. Representatives of the Canada School of Public Service, including David Waung, Vice President of Knowledge Management and Advanced Education, met with Mesta in several encounters between Canadian e-learning experts, the Mexican Ministry of Public Administration, and universities from both countries.

An earlier agreement, reached at the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Québec City, paved the way for this collaboration. Canadian and Mexican officials agreed to exchange experiences with Internet and Web-enabled technologies to improve innovation in public administration. The same Summit also gave rise to the [Institute for Connectivity in the Americas \(ICA\)](#), which together with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supported the development of the portal.

Waung, who helped set up the Canadian government's [Campusdirect](#) portal, recalls, "I promised to tell them all the mistakes I've made and to look over their shoulder to identify risk areas they haven't seen."

## Core competencies

The two teams worked closely to define the key elements of a competency-based management structure in the Mexican public sector. They analyzed diverse international schemes and national public administrations before the Ministry of Public Administration, in conjunction with experts from other Mexican ministries, settled upon five core managerial competencies: strategic vision, leadership, goal-oriented action, team work, and negotiation. Mesta acknowledges that some of these will be challenging. Teamwork is foreign to most government workers, he says, as is negotiation.

Claudia Iriarte, however, sees new opportunities. She heads the Citizen's Complaints area in the Ministry of Public Administration and participated in one of two pilot tests of the @Campus Mexico courses. "Training in managerial and technical competencies is good for the individual careers of public servants, even if they leave government."

As more countries in the Americas embark on civil service reform and initiatives to strengthen good governance practices, @Campus Mexico serves as an example of how e-learning can deliver training to large numbers of civil servants across vast geographical areas. The initiative has attracted the attention of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Organization of American States. There are also plans to extend the approach to other countries in the region.

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Learn more about @Campus Mexico, visit: [www.campusmexico.gob.mx/wb2/](http://www.campusmexico.gob.mx/wb2/).  
The Government of Canada's e-learning portal, Campusdirect can be found at:  
[www.campusdirect.gc.ca](http://www.campusdirect.gc.ca).

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## For more information:

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